

end of the war, Conservative elements in the city reclaimed control there during Presidential Reconstruction. Presidential Reconstruction essentially began on June 20, 1865, with the replacement of Radical Republican General Hawley with a more conservative General John W. Ames, who reversed many of Hawley's Radical actions. An aspect of Hawley's control that was especially onerous for Wilmington's Conservatives was his use of African American troops in the city. The presence of black troops instilled fear in white residents who were worried that the soldiers would incite rioting amongst the city's freedmen. For the most part, the soldiers did not instigate disturbances but, instead, provided a sense of security for freedmen who sought to exercise their newfound freedoms. Fears of black violence were largely unfounded although instances of black soldiers using their military influence and power over whites could be found during Presidential Reconstruction.¹⁰⁴

There were three civil disturbances in Wilmington during Presidential Reconstruction. The first took place in August 1865 when a black mob forced the resignation of Mayor Dawson and the Conservative municipal government, including the police force staffed by Confederate veterans. The uprising was short lived since the Conservative government was reinstated by General Ames and the Union army the following day. The police force, aided by eight groups of newly organized white militia units, then sought to disarm the city's blacks. The numbers of black soldiers in the city began to decline during Ames' administration and most of the

black troops were mustered out of service by the end of September 1866. The second and third disturbances happened in February 1866 and June 1868 and were a result of mobs attempting to free prisoners in the city jail. Another instance of white fears of black uprising played out in the summer of 1866 when blacks seeking city offices were refused by white leaders who argued that office holding abilities should be tied to voter privileges which were, at the time, not granted to blacks. The Reverend L. S. Burkhead of the Front Street Methodist Church detailed instances of black soldiers attempting to advocate on behalf of freedmen in his account published in the *Raleigh Christian Advocate*. With claims based on oral tradition and the missionary work of William Meredith among Wilmington's black population in the eighteenth century, black members of Burkhead's congregation sought ownership of the church and its property after the city fell to Union control in 1865. Burkhead and the white congregation were able to maintain control of the property despite efforts of black soldiers and parishioners to petition the Union army for reconciliation.¹⁰⁵

Stimulated by the sale of tar, turpentine, and cotton, coupled with increased usage of railroad lines leading from the port, Wilmington's economy began to recover by the spring of 1868. Conservative control of the city eroded with Congressional Reconstruction, which began in July 1868 and lasted until August 1870. During the period, most Republican activity sought to gain political equality for blacks and saw the rise of several black Republican militia units to enforce Republican agendas and maintain peace.¹⁰⁶

Although a stronghold of Republican activity, the city followed the state as Conservatives regained control of affairs in

¹⁰⁴ William K. Boyd, ed., "History of the Difficulties of the Pastorate of the Front Street Methodist Church, Wilmington, N.C. for the Year 1865," *Historical Papers of Trinity College* (Durham: Trinity College Historical Society, 1908-1909), 35-118; Evans, *Ballots and Fence Rails*, 250; Hamilton, *Reconstruction*, 159-161.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Evans, *Ballots and Fence Rails*, 79, 103, 141, 249.